

**KINGDOM OF BELGIUM**

Speech by

Karen Van Vlierberge,  
Deputy Permanent Representative  
of Belgium to the United Nations

**Middle East**

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Madam President,

I would like to thank the Special Coordinator, Mr Nickolay Mladenov for his presentation.

Madam President,

I would like to start by expressing my most sincere condolences to the Palestinian people following the **death of Mr Saeb Erekat**, Secretary General of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and his family. Saeb Erekat was a tireless defender of the two-State solution through negotiation.

Belgium shares this vision of a negotiated solution based on the coexistence of two States, with the city of Jerusalem as future capital of both States, in line with agreed international parameters.

We regretfully note that, on the ground, the proliferation of faits accomplis goes against this objective and risks shattering it for good. We once again call on all the parties to work to create an environment favourable to the resumption of negotiations and to act accordingly.

Madam President,

The Israeli settlement policy and related measures are continuing unabated. Not only is this policy illegal under international law, including resolution 2334, it is also counter-productive. It undermines the trust required to resume constructive dialogue and credible negotiations.

We share the serious concerns expressed by the High Representative of the European Union following the decision by the Israeli authorities to open the bidding process for the construction of housing units for a new settlement in **Givat Hamatos**. The Heads of Mission of the European Union

and other countries that share our views have seen this on the ground again this week: the construction of settlements in certain sensitive areas are likely to remove the option of Jerusalem as a shared capital and prevent any continuity between East Jerusalem and the rest of the Palestinian Territory. Any initiative in this direction must be renounced as strongly as possible if we want to give a chance to a viable, credible two-State solution.

In the same spirit, we must recall our shared responsibility to make a distinction in our discussions between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967, as recalled by resolution 2334. Differentiation is also a tool for preventing settlement and annexation, regardless of its name and scope.

The destruction of more than 80 structures in the village of **Khirbet Hamsa al-Foqa** is a shocking example of the alarming increase in the number of demolitions and confiscations in zone C in the West Bank, including humanitarian projects and structures. This trend is particularly alarming in the context of the current pandemic and its significant humanitarian impact on already fragile communities. We call on the Israeli authorities to cease the demolitions, restore the affected projects or pay compensation for damages, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Lastly, we are particularly concerned by the demolition of schools. Palestinian children have a right to education, as do all children around the world. Belgium therefore calls on the Israeli authorities to not execute the orders to demolish Ras al-Tin, Jinba and Khirbet al-Fakheit schools, and to protect the 52 West Bank schools at risk of demolition.

Madam President,

We are deeply concerned by the **economic and tax crisis in Palestine**, which is exacerbated by the suspension of civil and security coordination with Israel and the current pandemic. We welcome the announcement of the resumption of coordination between the Palestinian Authority and Israel based on previous agreements, given its impact on the Palestinian population and in order to build trust. We call on Israel to also take measures to highlight its commitment to these agreements.

We call on all the Palestinian factions to engage in good faith in the **reunification** of Gaza and the West Bank under a single legitimate and democratic authority. We strongly encourage the holding of democratic elections in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem and Gaza. In this perspective, it is important to preserve the space given over to Palestinian civil society and the exercise of public freedoms.

Madam President,

Allow me to conclude by stressing the important role that **UNRWA** plays, in the absence of a lasting solution; not only for Palestinian refugees, but also for the viability of the two-State solution and the stability and security of the region. It is important for the international community to maintain strong and predictable political and financial support, particularly in the context of the current pandemic.

Thank you.